

A Fourth TV Network?—Maybe

Reporting From The World Of Television and Radio

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The possibilities for establishing a fourth national commercial television network are being quietly pursued by a broadcasting industry group which has the open blessing of the Federal government.

Prominent figures have begun to associate themselves with the project.

For instance, a meeting scheduled here Friday morning by the so-called Subcommittee 2.1 of the Committee on All-Channel Broadcasting is expected to be attended by such well-known personalities as Sylvester L. (Pat) Weaver, onetime NBC board chairman and recently head of the ill-fated California pay-TV operation; former film star and TV producer Robert Montgomery, president of the Screen Actors Guild, and TV producer-host David Susskind.

The avowed purpose of the meeting, according to Lawrence Turet, chairman of the subcommittee, is "to discuss the possibility of a fourth network."

Turet is executive vice-president of WUHF-TV, Milwaukee, a Channel 18 ultra high frequency station which, although not affiliated with any of the three present TV networks, carries about 25 hours weekly of network programming rejected by Milwaukee's three network affiliates. For example, ABC's Peter Jennings and CBS's Walter Cronkite newscasts are aired by WUHF-TV.

PROGRAMMING

Regarding a possible fourth network, Turet said, "The question is, is there enough programming available? That's one thing we will consider on Friday."

Turet said "something like 30 or 40" television station executives are expected to attend the meeting, including people like Bennett Korn, president of Metropolitan Broadcasting (WNEW-TV, New York, and other stations).

Turet's group is a subcommittee of one headed by Seymour N. Siegel, director of New York City's Municipal Broadcasting System, which operates WNYC-TV (Channel 31). Siegel's subcommittee in turn is one of three units of CAB, a group organized two years ago to investigate ways of promoting UHF stations and programming.

Chairman of CAB is Federal Communications Commissioner Robert E. Lee, who has been the FCC's best dedicated advocate of UHF development.

U. S. PRESENCE

He will sit in on the deliberations Friday. The presence of a government representative is necessary in such an undertaking to preclude any anti-trust implications.

Officials of National Educational Television are expected to be observers at the session.

Among the participants will be Edwin Cooperstein, president of WNJU-TV, Newark, the new Channel 47 station which is scheduled to make its debut next Sunday, transmitting from atop the Empire State Building like all New York TV stations.

Robert Montgomery and David Susskind presumably are interested in the CAB deliberations because of the prospect that a fourth network would break the monopoly on programming now exercised by the three established chains.

'MONOPOLY'

Only last week in Hollywood

Montgomery unleashed a blistering attack on network control of programming, calling it a "monopoly—against public interest."

He described the networks as exerting "an unholy influence over industry, politics, and current social problems—and the actor."

Siegel said the meeting this week will consider such questions as "are there enough stations in major markets not new network-affiliated to form a competitive network" and "are there sufficient talent and programming sources available to provide a consistent programming schedule covering all areas, such as entertainment, news, sports and so forth."

There are less than 20 major commercial non-network TV stations in the country, three of them in New York and three in Los Angeles.

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